

2021-2022 COVID-19 Safety Protocols

Draft for First Reading - 8/11/21

Lowell Public Schools (LPS) is committed to providing school environments that promote student health, well-being and achievement. The district recognizes that schools play a critical role in promoting the health and safety of all learners. School personnel, together with students, families and members of the greater Lowell community must work together through a collaborative approach to ensure the safety of all members of the community throughout the course of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Regulations related to COVID-19 continue to evolve. LPS must remain nimble to adapt as new variants of the virus emerge, new research findings are released and the efficacy of available vaccines is assessed. For the 2021-2022 academic year, LPS will follow all guidance regarding COVID-19 safety protocols provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) which continues to work in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH).

The superintendent shall adjust safety protocols for all LPS schools if required at any time by DESE or as required at any time in consultation with the City of Lowell to adhere to safety requirements which may be later established for Lowell's public buildings.

Masks and Face Coverings

As of July 30, 2021, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in consultation with the MA Department of Public Health has provided the following guidance for masks and face coverings for students, staff and visitors, ranging from optional to required:

1. Strongly recommend all students in kindergarten through grade 6 wear masks when indoors, except students who cannot do so due to medical conditions or behavioral needs. Masks are not necessary outdoors and may be removed while eating indoors.
2. Strongly recommend that unvaccinated staff in all grades, unvaccinated students in grades 7 and above, and unvaccinated visitors wear masks indoors.
3. Recommend that schools allow vaccinated students to remain unmasked.
4. Encourage any individual at higher risk for severe disease from COVID or with a household member who is at high risk to mask regardless of vaccination status.
5. Support any child or family who prefers to mask at school at any time.
6. Require, by federal public health order, all students and staff to wear masks on school buses at this time.
7. Require all staff and students to wear masks while in school health offices. Additional guidance for school health professionals is forthcoming from DPH.

COVID-19 Testing and Quarantining

LPS will continue to maintain a robust plan for COVID-19 testing in schools to include the screening (pooled) testing for students and staff while DESE and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services continue to offer these services at no cost to the District.

LPS will apply for the statewide COVID-19 testing program as soon as it becomes available to minimize the number of students required to quarantine outside of school, and will adhere to the following DESE guidance for quarantining of staff and students:

- Districts in the statewide testing program will be able to implement a new “test and stay”

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protocol in lieu of requiring asymptomatic close contacts to quarantine.

- Under test and stay, asymptomatic close contacts will have the option to remain in school and be tested daily with BinaxNOW for at least 5 days.
- Vaccinated staff and students are exempt from quarantine.

Medically Approved Extended Absences

On March 5, 2021, the MA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted amendments to the Student Learning Time regulations on an emergency basis. These amendments provide the Commissioner of Education with the authority to determine when hybrid and remote models will and will not count toward meeting the required student learning time hours. 603 CMR 27.08(2)(d). For the 2021-2022 academic year, remote learning has not been approved for student learning time under any circumstances related to COVID-19.

In circumstances of medically approved absences related to COVID-19:

1. For students, requests will continue to follow the relevant procedures outlined in section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (504) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Home teaching or tutoring may be provided for those students who cannot attend regular classes because of certified medical or special needs reasons, each of which must be documented by a medical statement or an official Individual Education Plan (IEP) as described in the LPS policy manual.

Home teaching assignments may be coordinated by an appropriate building leader. A tutor (certified instructor approved by the LPS) will be assigned to support homebound instruction. Expectations regarding grading and credits will be worked out before and as part of the arrangements, procedure, and implementation of the home teaching or tutoring effort. The tutor will coordinate the work and evaluation with the respective teacher and the Department Head of each subject covered.

2. For employees, requests for medical leave will continue to follow the procedures outlined in the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), in accordance with all relevant LPS policies.

Eligible LPS staff may also request a full year of unpaid leave, following the relevant provisions of the Collective Bargaining Agreements.